

ARTICLES ON DISOBEDIENCE.

IF ever a subject has been well thrashed out, surely it is this one of how, when, and where to inculcate a spirit of obedience in our children. We say *spirit* of obedience because it is that in truth at which we really aim — the attainment of that meekness and loyalty of heart which recognizes what is rightly due to superiority of character, attainment, and age in those in authority over us. A habit of constantly "caving in" just because the contrary means a disagreeable result of some kind or other is sometimes most mistakenly accounted obedience. All we can concede to such an obedience is that it is the outmost shell, of an obedient spirit, in which there *may* be enclosed the thing itself. If we are right in taking obedience to be an unconscious bowing down to a spirit greater than one's own, and since the power to recognize such superiority is one of the features of childhood, surely our first work must be to ourselves attain such a superiority. Have we not all met with men and women whom it was a delight to obey, or whom it would have been, at any rate, all but impossible to disobey?

What is the force in such characters compelling obedience?

We may not be able to give it a name, but, as one of the possibilities of humanity, we may all attain it — not for the sake of consciously exercising power over others, but in order that we may call forth that spirit of love and loyalty which lies deep within all obedience.

We have no right to expect obedience if love and wisdom, truth and goodness, are not the breath of our spiritual life. There is no authority where these are not, and we may as well expect shadow without substance as obedience where authority tries to rear itself on mere superiority of age, or intellectual attainment, or physical force.

We are so fond of setting to work on the children, but first let us recognize the beam in our own eye, and then with quickened perception and minds enlightened we may be found worthy to lead our children to the fulfilment of the whole duty of man — fearing God and keeping His commandments.

B. E. F.

OBEDIENCE implies Law in itself. While there is an orderly Universe law must exist, otherwise there would be chaos. Laws unfulfilled or broken cause a rupture in the progress of life, and the result is death, decay, sorrow of one kind or another. There are certain conditions of Nature upon which the well-being of our natural bodies depends. We know of these; we obey them and live; others we are ignorant of possibly, or we disobey through wilfulness and — we die. And as there are natural laws to ensure an orderly physical world, so there are social laws to ensure an orderly society or political world. If men persistently ignore these the state becomes corrupt as we may read in the histories of Greece and Rome, and decay and dissolution inevitably result. As there are laws governing society as a whole, so there must be certain conditions governing individuals, that is, in the home, and it is here that the child learns its first lesson in that obedience which it owes to those immediately surrounding it, to society and to God, the obedience which shall hereafter, in this world or the next, make its name worthy to be ranked with history's heroes. Whether he does learn this lesson depends entirely upon his home influence.

"There's a chiel amang us takin' notes," and in faith if we are ourselves disobedient to each other, to Nature, or to God, he will perceive it, and our power over him, as one to whom honour is due, will be gone. We shall have broken the command "Offend not one of these," with the result that the "little ones" do in their turn offend. After great carefulness, however, in this particular we may find our children still show a strong disposition to go their own way, and to one born with a love of power, obedience will be very difficult. "Why did you do it?" I once heard someone say, patiently enough, and the perfectly truthful answer given with neither defiance nor impudence was: "I believe, just because you told me not to," and out of this spirit has arisen that idea of boys which Tom Brown puts rather well in his School-days — that "rules" are a challenge to the ordinary healthy schoolboy, and he is wanting in pluck who does not take it up. The substitution of the *lex nonscripta* has done much to eradicate this theory, but remnants of it linger yet in human nature, and how is it to be met? After all, the desire to rule is not a wrong one; rather, it shows the making of a noble character, and one to whom a high ideal would be sure to appeal. Keep before such a child, therefore, the spirit of the words that even "Kings obey"; that he who rules his own will is greater than he who takes a city, and before very long he will grasp the truth that "obedience is the bond of rule." Finally, disobedience may arise from many causes, and in each case the

treatment depends upon the discretion of the parents; obedience, however, should have but one — the cause of Right.

I obey, not because it is the best policy, but because it is right. I do what is right because I love Right, that is, I love Goodness, I love God. I perceive that because of my love I must obey. This should be our reason; this is the teaching of Christ when He said:

"If ye love Me, keep My commandments."

We shall find that the whole complex system of laws, which when we regard them separately seem like prison bars to crush us, is comprehended in the simple command:

"Love one another."

F. R.

DISOBEDIENCE is a difficult habit to cure in children.

It never does to get impatient, as I have found to my cost; a morning's work has been spoilt by it, and it has utterly destroyed a week's work of patience.

Point-blank refusal to do lessons, music, or take a walk, is tiresome to deal with. It is not easy always to direct the thoughts, and keep up fun, when one wants steady application and attention.

As Miss Mason's lecture on "Character and Disposition" furnished me with a clue to overcome disobedience, which has been tried and not found wanting, I will hand it on to whomsoever cares to adopt it, as they will find it an admirable plan, slow but sure in its result. As far as I can express it, it is as follows:—That those who have the care of children should remember that they must feel their power of authority, expect obedience, and observe an attitude of expectant attention.

I trust it may be a helpful idea to those who have to struggle with the difficulty. Impatience takes wings when one remembers that it is not what *we want* the children to do, nor how *we want* to guide and advise them, but that patient effort on our own part may be the means of producing steady progress in the setting up of the right habits and principles.

ONE of the most interesting of the books on our bookshelves which we have seen recommended at different times in connection with the P.N.E.U. is the translation of *Levana* by Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, the "humorous, pathetic, poetic Richter, whom his countrymen call 'Jean Paul, der Einzige.'" I have lately been reading over again what he says about "Obedience," and should like to pass on to any who may not have the opportunity of reading the book for themselves a little of what he says on the subject. To begin with the modes of commanding and forbidding — "Take no pleasure in ordering to do or not to do, but in the child's free action. Forbid seldomer by actions than by words; do not snatch the knife out of the child's hands, but let him lay it down himself at your desire. In the first case he obeys the pressure of a foreign power, in the second, its guidance." Then come some hints which we as students may find very useful, though, like most of the book, they are written to parents. "The child's ear readily distinguishes a decided from an angry tone of voice; the mother easily falls into the latter when she attempts to imitate the father in the former. His commands are better obeyed than hers for three reasons; the first, his decided though far removed from angry voice has been already mentioned. The second is that the man, for the most part, like the warrior, says only one and consequently the same imperial NO; whereas women can scarcely say to a child, 'Be quiet!' without colon and semicolon, and most necessary notes of interrogation and exclamation." Rather hard on women perhaps we think, and still more so when he says, "Could a general in commanding her marching army to halt, ever express herself otherwise than thus: 'All you people, as soon as I have done speaking, I command you all to stand still in your places; halt, I tell you!' Further, we grown-up people all have and admit (though without deriving any peculiar benefit from it) the fault of considering every difference of a child from ourselves as a failing, our scoldings as lessons, childish errors as greater than our own."

Richter says much to show that constant telling and ordering are of very little use, and also that one should forbid in a gentle voice, and only once.

"Parents and teachers would more frequently punish according to the line of exact justice, if after every fault in a child they would only count four and twenty, or their buttons, or their fingers. They would thereby let the deceiving present, round themselves as well as round the children, escape; the cold, still empire of clearness would remain behind."

"The obedience of children in itself alone without consideration

of its motive can have no other value than that thereby much is made easier to the parents" (or teacher). Richter recommends that wishes should sometimes be expressed to children, the carrying out of which would entirely depend on their love and free choice, to exercise them in freedom, love and merit. "The requests should be made in the gentlest tone of voice (but without giving any reasons) and recompensed by gladness at its fulfilment," but its refusal must not be punished.

Perhaps all have felt at some time or other how difficult it is, when an act of disobedience has required punishment, to avoid any appearance of displeasure or coldness afterwards. "A serious punishment of a child is scarcely so important as the quarter of an hour immediately succeeding, and the transition to forgiveness. During this time one may speak much if the gentlest possible tone of voice be used, and soften the grief of others by showing our own."

No doubt all Students of the House of Education wish very much that no punishing was ever necessary, and try by all means in their power to secure happy unquestioning obedience from the little people round them and will quite enter into the feelings of Richter when he says on beginning the chapter on Punishments: "This unchildlike word will scarcely issue from my pen. I would rather write pain or aftersmart. Punishment should only apply to the guilty conscience, and in the beginning children, like animals, have only an innocent one."

As we are considering this difficult subject of commanding and punishing, and remember that it is with children destined some day to fill their place in the world, that we have to deal, may I conclude with these words from Richter: "Let a child be more holy to you than the present which consists of things and matured men. By means of the child—although with difficulty—by means of the short lever arm of humanity, you set in motion the long one whose mighty arc you can scarcely define in the height and depth of time. But there is something else you certainly know, namely, that the moral development—which is education as the intellectual is instruction—knows and fears no time nor futurity. In this you give to the child a heaven with a pole-star, which may ever guide him in whatever new countries he may afterwards reach."

K. S. WOOD.

We have received several other letters on this subject, and in all this special note is struck—that the presence or absence of an obedient spirit in children depends almost wholly upon those in authority. Much emphasis is laid upon the necessity of perfect freedom from brusqueness and severity in expressing our wishes and commands, and in the case of older children we may go so far as to give reasons for such commands. From this latter proposition we feel we must differ. The reasonableness of children by no means depends on their age; and while we grant that there may be occasions on which even small children may have the reason of the command given them, we are inclined to think an unquestioning obedience is the right attitude of mind for all who can be still called children. The truth of one fact brought forward, the experience of most will fully "bear out,"—this: that the *hearing* even of an order at once stirs up opposition in the minds of certain high-spirited children. But is not this opposition caused by the tone of voice adopted, and the state of feeling existing between the children and their parents or teachers? A selfless love for the children entrusted to us must, by its very nature, draw out *their* power of loving, and where a union of this high order exists between ruler and ruled there is little chance that opposition will be frequent or sustained.

SUB-EDITOR.

The Editor would like to know what is the general experience with regard to giving reasons for commands. She herself has found that it answers very well, though she agrees with the Sub-editor that all commands should not be explained.